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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000700

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SUBJECT: GIROA STRONGLY CONDEMNS TERRORIST ATTACK ON KABUL
- EXTENDS CONDOLENCES TO INDIA

¶1. The Afghan government swung into action to publicly and strongly condemn Taliban suicide and car bomb attacks in central Kabul the morning of February 26 that killed at least 13 people and wounded approximately thirty-two. Demonstrating an unprecedented degree of intergovernmental cooperation, spokespersons from the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the Office of the President, and the Government Media and Information Center (GMIC) began coordinating within an hour of the 6:30 a.m. attack. The MOI spokesman provided numerous interviews detailing events even as the attacks were ongoing.

¶2. The Palace issued a strong statement in Pashto condemning attacks on this special Islamic holiday, calling the attackers "enemies of Islam and the Afghan people" and consigning them to hell. Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs Mohammad Yousuf Niazi instructed mullahs to condemn the attack in their Friday prayers. Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) filmed sermons of condemnation at four main Kabul mosques during two o'clock prayers for broadcasting on the evening news. The deputy head of the Ulema Council, Mullah Manawi, will condemn the attacks in a special program being filmed at 5:00 by RTA.

¶3. The Afghan security forces brought the situation under control within two hours. Although it was first thought the Safi Landmark hotel was the target of the attacks, media reports indicate the Taliban spokesman who claimed responsibility indicated that "foreign" guest houses in the area were the targets. Four Indian nationals were killed.

¶4. An informal translation of the Palace Statement issued in Pashto at 1:30 p.m. reads:

Begin Statement: Presidential Palace: H.E. Hamid Karzai President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan condemned in the strongest terms the terrorist attack in Kabul's Shar e Nau area that killed and injured many civilians.

Terrorists targeted this morning two hotels around Ansari square in Kabul where mostly Indian nationals were housed. At least thirteen people including four Indians and an Italian national were killed and many more were injured.

President Karzai is saddened by the un-Islamic and inhuman act saying, "The attack on a Muslim holiday of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) birth anniversary clearly shows that the perpetrators are indeed the enemies of Islam and the people of Afghanistan and will be burning in hell fires."

The President instructed the public health ministry to put to use all possible means and resources for a speedy recovery of the injured.

The President also ordered all security agencies to make every possible effort to capture the organizers and perpetrators of the terrorist act and report back.

President Hamid Karzai extends deep sympathies and condolences to the people and government of India and to the families of the victims and prays for a quick recovery of the injured. End Statement

15. The USG issued the following statement:

Begin Statement: The United States strongly condemns the brutal attack this morning in central Kabul, which has killed and injured many innocent Afghans and citizens of other nations. We condemn this inhumane act by the Taliban, which was carried out on a holiday focused on family and prayer.

We commend the Afghan National Security Forces for bringing the situation under control quickly. Our thoughts and condolences are with those affected by this act of terror. The United States remains firmly committed to working side-by-side with the Afghan Government and people, as well as our international partners, to deliver security and a better future to Afghanistan. End Statement

16. (SBU) Comment: Compared to its past inability to respond effectively to weekend events, the Afghan government's public response has been robust, well-coordinated, and on target. It leveraged the fact that the attack took place on a special Islamic holiday to give lie to the Taliban's claim to be the representatives of Islam. Effective collaboration between newly installed Presidential Palace Spokesman Waheed Omer and staff from the MOI, GMIC, the Hajj and Religious Affairs Ministry, and RTA ensured that the tragic events of the day have been condemned officially and unequivocally for what they are - terrorism. Also noteworthy in the palace

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statement is the singling out of Indian victims, a clear swipe at Pakistan, who many speculate may have been behind the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul in 2009. End Comment.
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